BEAST OF EAST

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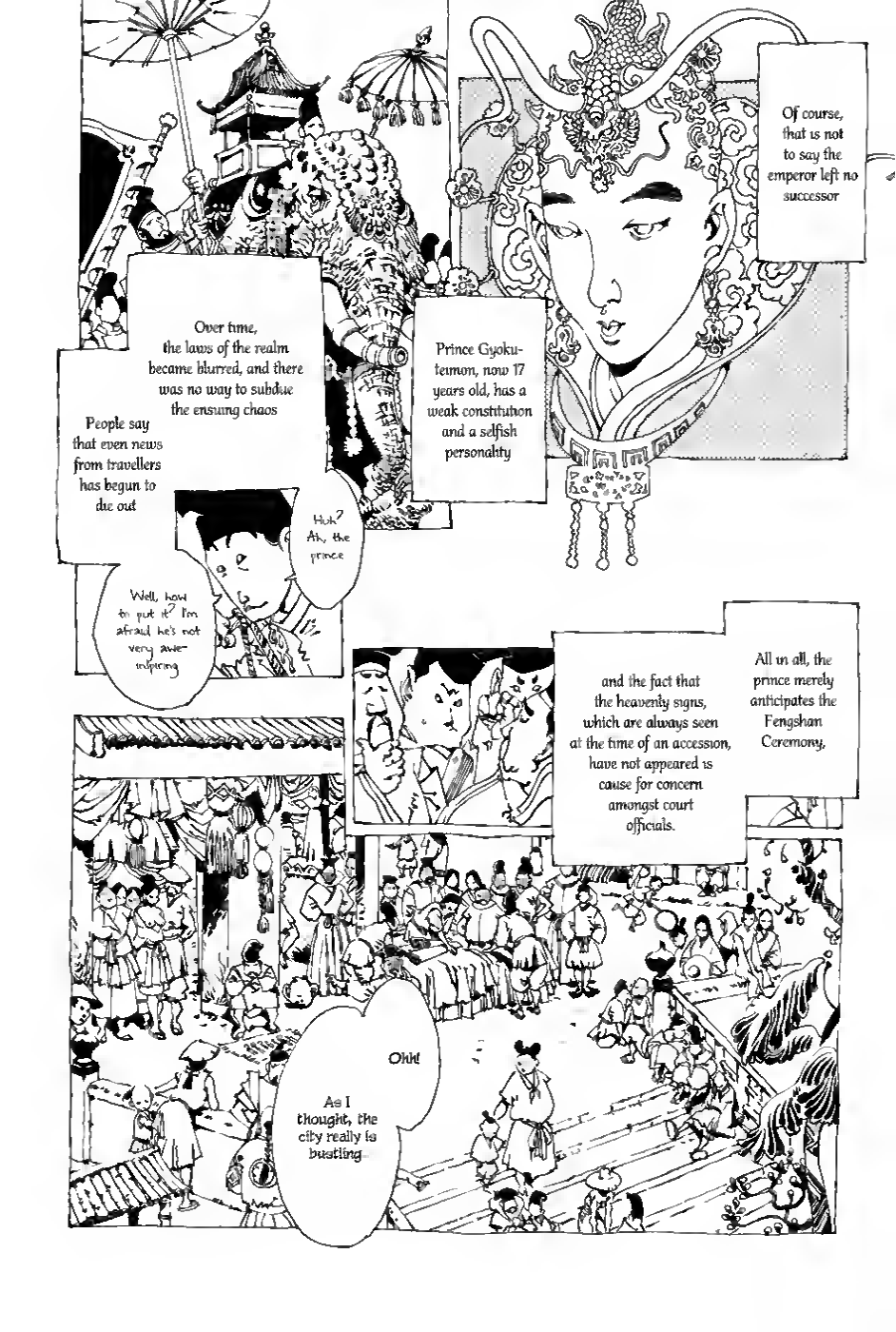
CHAPTER 1
MIKUZU

Preface
At Torbeno — The multicoloured curtain
Instruments are tuned.
A banshee...?
What a bloodcurdling cry.
Oh,
the one that foretells a person's death?
HMPH!
Listen closely if you're interested.
Ask the spectre and she'll tell you the names of who will die today, or so they say.
Dunno what happens if you hear your own name, though.
Nowadays it's a miracle if you're able to walk and talk.
Don't act so surprised.
Such stories are a sign of the times.
the plague, pillaging
War,
Men who value their lives tend to live longer.
Let's hurry then.
Kobolds and ogres come out after sundown in these parts.

Banshee...
Of those who will die today
Oh Banshee,
will it be Yukitsuna's turn today?
Is Sakabe no Shoji Yukitsuna, Keeper of the Imperial Archives, among them?

First Act Introductory flute. Listen, then cross over. Modoribashi.

BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF JAPONE
Our tale takes place in the heaven blessed Keiun Era Japan. Gregorian calendar, 7th century AD
Already three years have hurried past, as if in the blink of an eye.
Since the demise of the last emperor, his empty place in the Great Council Hall is hitherto unfilled.
Goblin
Kobold
so that nobody comes or goes on its deserted thoroughfares late at night
At Toribeno, or the abandoned capital of Nagaoka-kyo, one may occasionally catch sight of koboldS, goblins, and the like. These grotesque monsters have also repeatedly strayed into the capital,
What's more, being robbed has become the least of people's worries.
At night, ominous stars race ceaselessly across the sky, and human hearts tremble as if it were Tenma Hajun himself.
Before long there came famine, pestilence and war, until even birdsong had vanished from the landscape


Of course, that is not to say the emperor left no successor
Prince Gyoku-teimon, now 17 years old, has a weak constitution and a selfish personality
Over time, the laws of the realm became blurred, and there was no way to subdue the ensuing chaos
People say that even news from travellers has begun to die out
Huh? Ah, the prince
Well, how to put it? I'm afraid he's not very awe-inspiring
All in all, the prince merely anticipates the Fengshan Ceremony,
and the fact that the heavenly signs, which are always seen at the time of an accession, have not appeared is cause for concern amongst court officials.
Ohh!
As I thought, the city really is bustling

In that case, wouldn't you rather live in the city?
Yup.
I see Oniomaru is fond of busy places.
You'll die of boredom out in the country.
The village has no peace as long as you're there
Whether in troubled times or at the end of days, it's fun when people flock together
What's with you?
Every-body back home talks about it.
They don't know where Oniomaru came from, he has no place in the world. They say he must be a tengu's child.
Such a person could never live in the country.
buy wine then secretly drink it on the way home and replace it with water, like a child would.
You're boastful, play pranks,
Try saying that again, you rotten old hag
I'm not afraid of walking home at night
But, because the tengu's child is always with me.
It's the rumour mill.
Like I said, they're not my words!

Is the illness still serious?
What did the doctor say?
Because it's not a normal disease,
He suggested I go to a reputed yin yang doctor in the capital and see what he says.
For me,
as long as I can be with father, anywhere will do.
As for you,
if your father is cured and receives a pardon, you'll be able to move back to the city.
and I'll go with Mikuzu to call on that famous yin yang doctor.
You stick around here to buy pottery,
Anyway, old hag,
we're in the capital!
HMPH!
I bet you'll leave her at the door then go sightseeing at the riverbed, no?
The riverbed?
Right, Onio-maru?
Where the kugutsu theatre is.
They say naked girls dance like puppets there.
Chicken hag.
I'll wring your neck when we get home.

Yes?
I have a question..
Is Lord Kamo no Mitsuyoshi to be found here?
Er,
I'm afraid I have not seen him yet today...
And what might your name be, sir?
Let me wait here then.
I know my way.
Well...
Ah...
I have an urgent request to make.
Please, direct me to your master.

Hmm, how troubling.
but truly, he is not at home.
My master is a compassionate man. If he were here I would certainly take you to meet him.
Yes.
Is that so?
It may be hard on a young lady's feet, but do come again.

What the heck, kid?!
How'd you get here?! Weren't you standing behind me before?!
Are there front row seats as well as standing room?!
Keep it down! The admission fee is 1 zeni!
HEY, MISS!!
OVER HERE, MISS!
ONIO-MARU!!
Oh.
The rotten old hag. You look like you've seen a ghost.
OVER BY THE BRIDGE, MIKUZU WAS...
I JUST KNEW YOU'D BE HERE A FINE MESS!
HAVE SOME SHAME!
MIKUZU?!
WHAT ABOUT MIKUZU?!
GOBLINS?!
TH- THE GOBLINS..
I'LL SLAP THEM SIDEWAYS FOR YOU
GONNA BORROW THIS!

H-
HEY!
THERE'S MORE THAN ONE GOBLIN!
AND?!
TWO WILL TAKE NO TIME AT ALL!
There are four of them.
I'll do my best~
Ahh, that young-ster...

He's gone and destroyed my theatre.
Ya think he'd get here in time?
Some.. Somebody call the Chief of Police, quick!
What are they doing outside in broad daylight ..?

Hi there, monsters.
Or are you small fry?
Let the girl go and get outta my sight,
Then you might escape with your lives.
Alright, you got guts.
Assuming I'm not mistaken, you'll all
GET BEATEN TO A PULP!!

Huh?
Behind you, youngster.

Back,
then left.
Now to your right.
?!
Back.
Right.
They're in front of you.
Right.
Back.
Right
Left!
Front!

Don't you feel better now?
You probably haven't noticed, but if you mime weaving a bamboo basket then goblins won't move.
There's magic in a bamboo basket.
Who are you, old man?
Pointing out directions...
Are you...?
An on-myoji?
Don't be silly.
I'm guildmaster of the kugutsu theatre you destroyed.
Still, you got a pretty good fighting style.
With the right teacher you could be a first class martial artist.

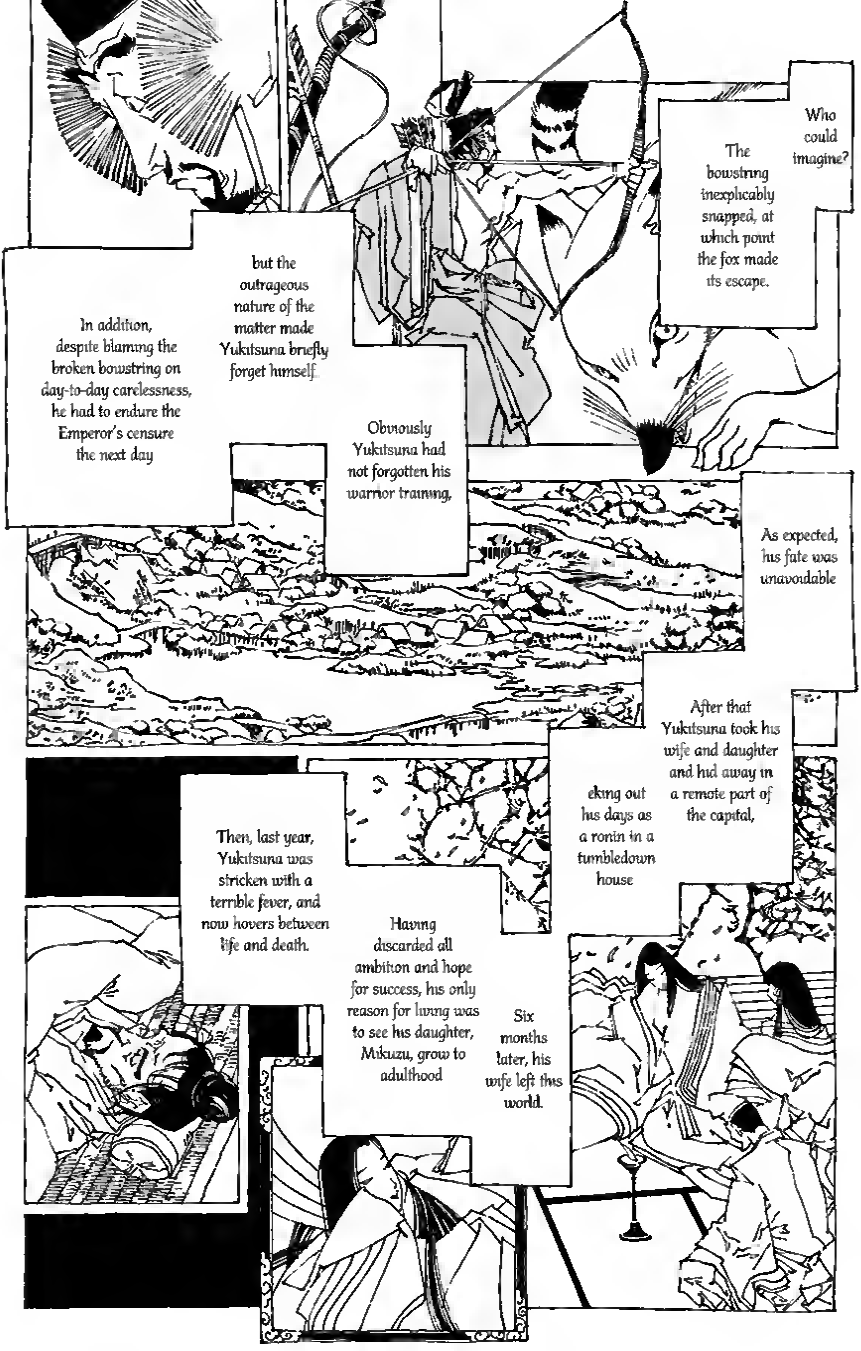
You kept me waiting, Lord Mitsu-yoshi.
Ah. . Much obliged.
You must be aware what time this is.
because you refuse to attend the privy council meetings.
The Chief Councillor of State is offended
You would intrude in a place like this?
What a boorish fellow
I'm no good with political stuff.
Gimme a break.
But I thought some of them still hadn't been sighted.
The prince's heavenly signs?

When our late emperor ascended the throne, a cloud shaped like a phoenix appeared over the palace
Without it, the nation would not have recognised him as the Child of Heaven.
If nothing came of your divining, then it probably won't matter whatever we do.
Well now, that
would be a bad omen.
You must be joking
How could I possibly understand something Abe no Seimei cannot see through?
It seems the phantom haze is definitely growing thicker, but what could its true nature be?
Yeah.
Goblins are coming out in broad daylight on the streets.
but what do you think?
I hesitate to ask Lord Mitsuyoshi,

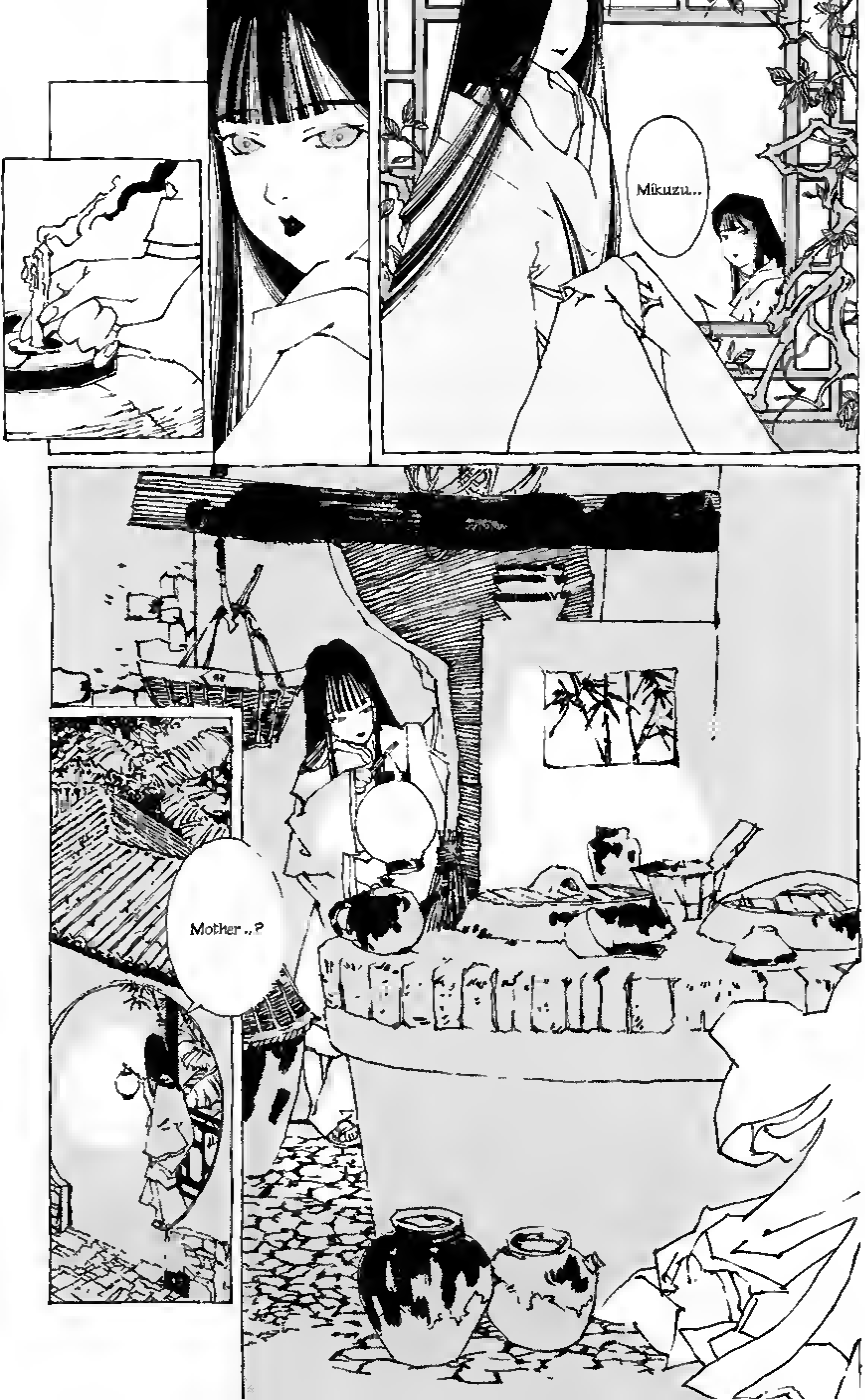
The po-faced son of a bitch...
...I shall convey that to my master.
As you see fit.
Well, whatever.
If I'm not forgiven, I'll pay a visit to your estate before too long.
Dammit.
A shiki was spying on us.
Mikuzu,
it's fine if you want to go to town tomorrow.
despite what happened today, you should know

I'm so very grateful for today.
Orio-maru.
Yeah.
Next time I won't leave your side.
OLD HAG!
Better to sell her body as a prostitute in Eguchi...
The doctor can't help,
not to mention how much that onmyoji might cost.
Dear me,
what a pitiful sight.
I know, I know.
if Mikuzu mentions it,
you can be sure I'll make you regret having lived this long
Don't ever say that in front of Mikuzu. Not even as a joke.
The girl would go through with it for her father.

In the past,
Mikuzu's father Sakabe no Shoji Yukitsuna, Keeper of the Imperial Archives, was a soldier assigned to the north west imperial palace
One evening
the Chief Advisor spied a fox hiding under the steps of the Seiryoden dining platform, and ordered that it be shot
Yukitsuna happened to be there, so he fixed an arrow to his bow and aimed it at the fox. He was mere moments from firing that arrow
Mikuzu will be happy once you have made a speedy recovery
So please rest easy, father.
Oniomaru will do whatever I ask of him. .
Mikuzu,
did you make sure to thank Oniomaru properly?
Yes.
I'm sorry.
You also suffer because of me.

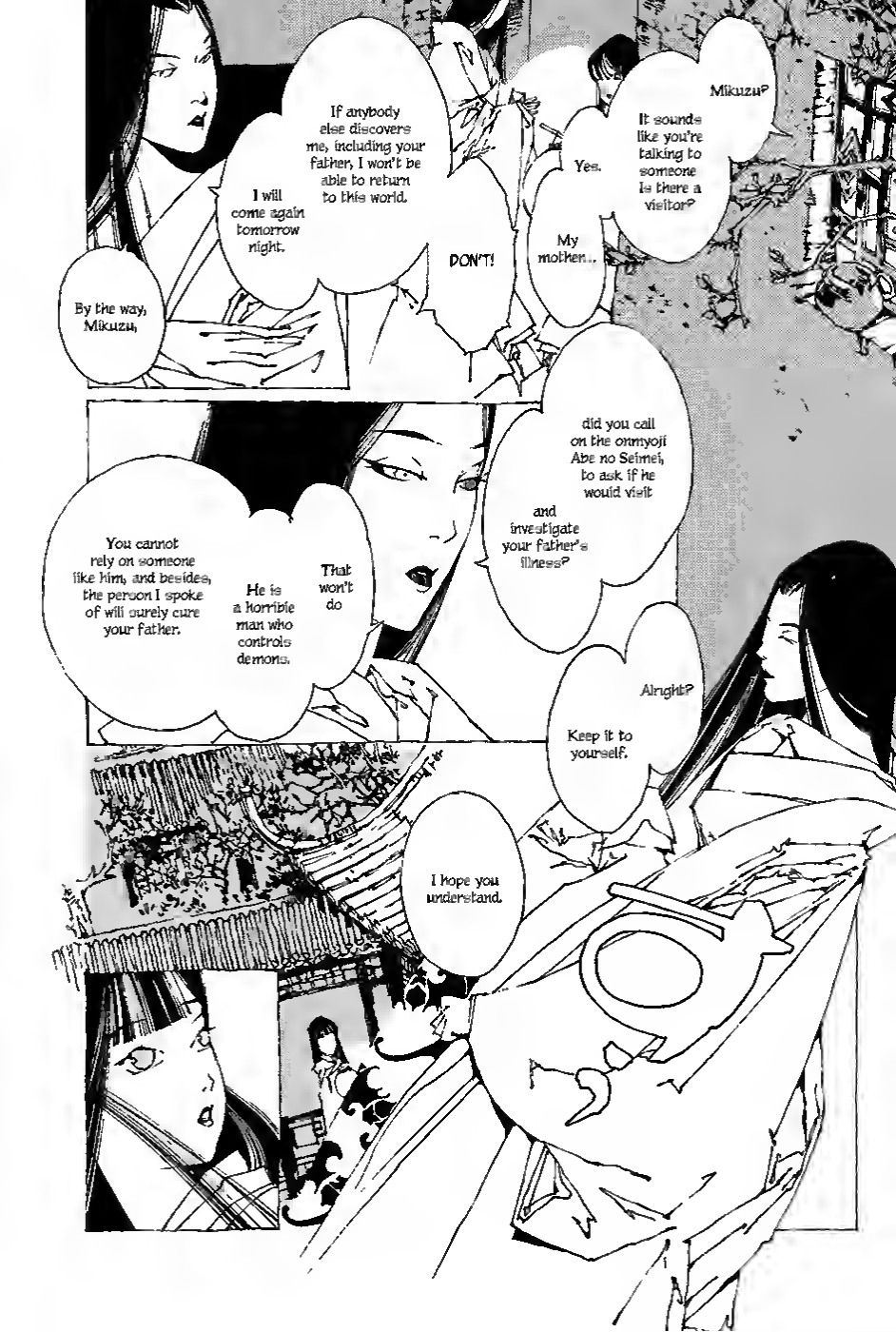

Who could imagine?
The bowstring inexplicably snapped, at which point the fox made its escape.
but the outrageous nature of the matter made Yukitsuna briefly forget himself.
In addition, despite blaming the broken bowstring on day-to-day carelessness, he had to endure the Emperor's censure the next day
Obviously Yukitsuna had not forgotten his warrior training.
As expected, his fate was unavoidable
After that Yukitsuna took his wife and daughter and hid away in a remote part of the capital,
eking out his days as a ronin in a tumbledown house
Then, last year, Yukitsuna was stricken with a terrible fever, and now hovers between life and death.
Having discarded all ambition and hope for success, his only reason for living was to see his daughter, Mikuzu, grow to adulthood
Six months later, his wife left this world.

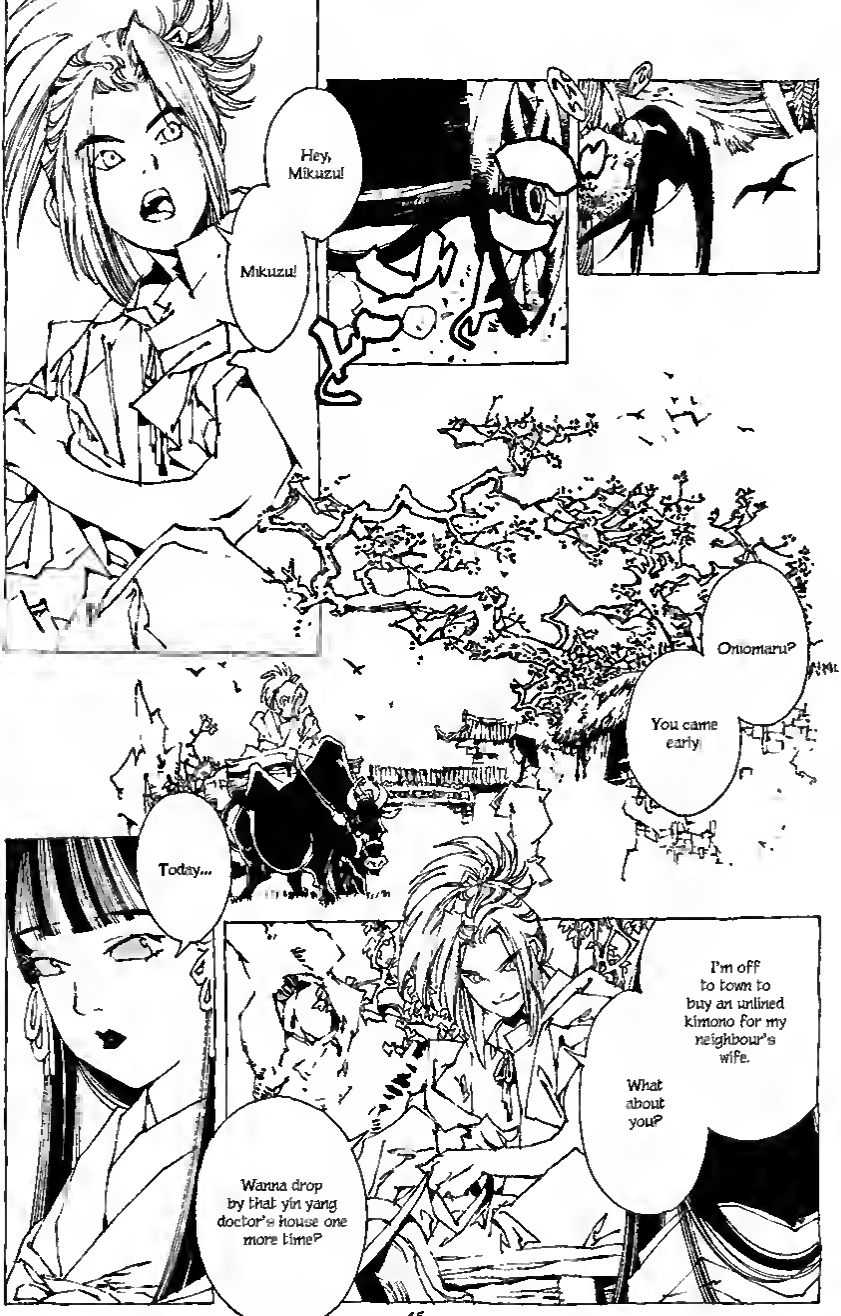
There were many who had their pity from that lovely girl as she desperately tried to find a way to cure her father's illness.
In particular, the hooligan Oniomaru always kept an eye on Mikuzu,
even when he was done helping the other villagers
He was forever at the ronin's daughter's side, watching over her with the look of a tiger or a leopard.
That is how they spent their days
Until, one night, an unforeseen tragedy occurred.
Mikuzu...

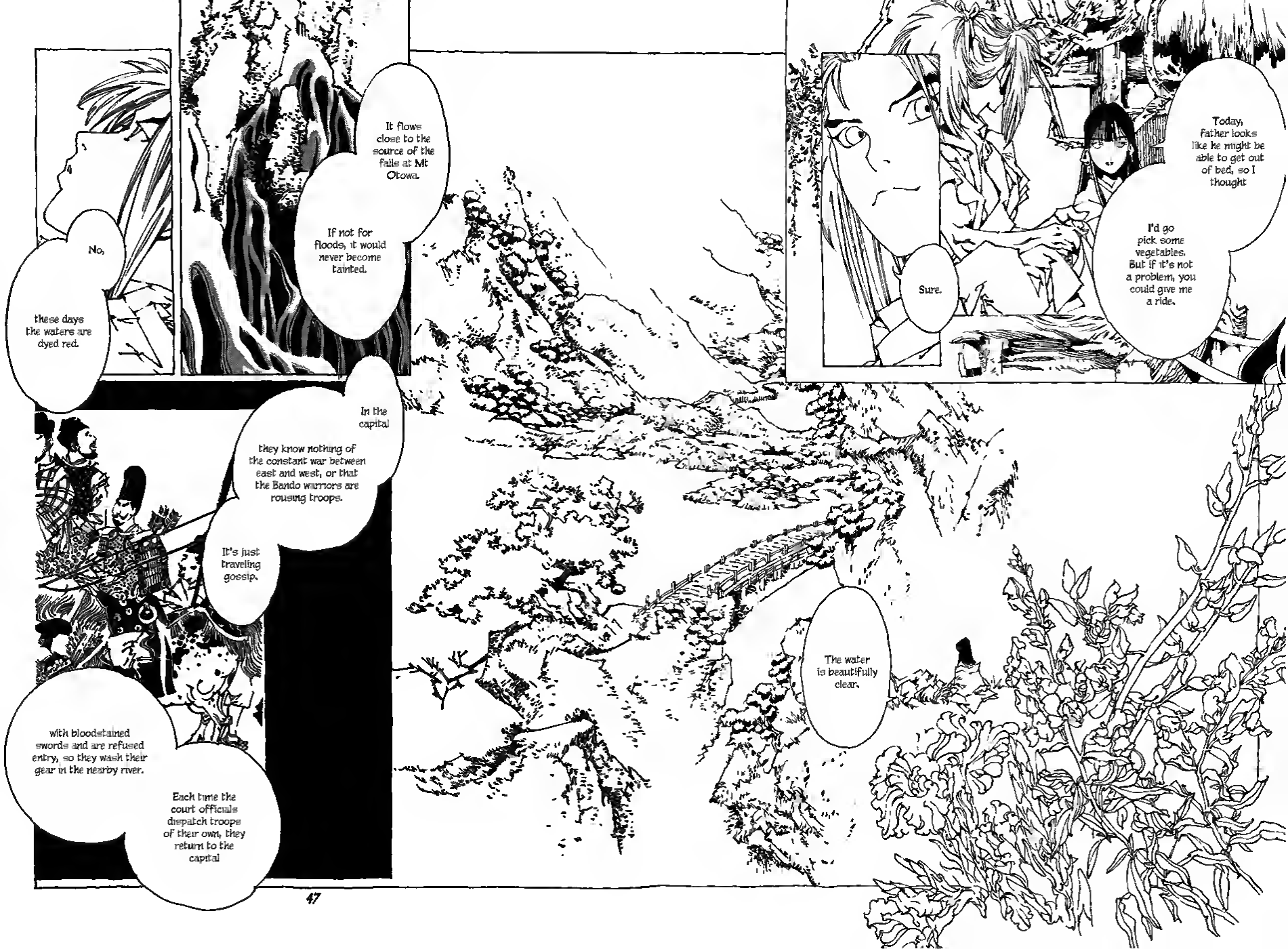

Mikuzu...
Mother..?

Come, Mikuzu.
Let your mother see your face.

Wh..
Where to?
Come with me.
Now, if we just stand here talking it will wake your father.
Mother..
My, look how much you've grown.
You have become a beautiful young woman.
To visit a certain person who can return your mother to this world.
Thus, I have appeared before you in this indistinct form because of a most important matter.
If we did that, then the two of us could live together once again.
There is somebody who has the power to help me regain my human body.
Listen to me, Mikuzu.
I can still come and go between this world and the other.
Please,
won't you go see my father too?

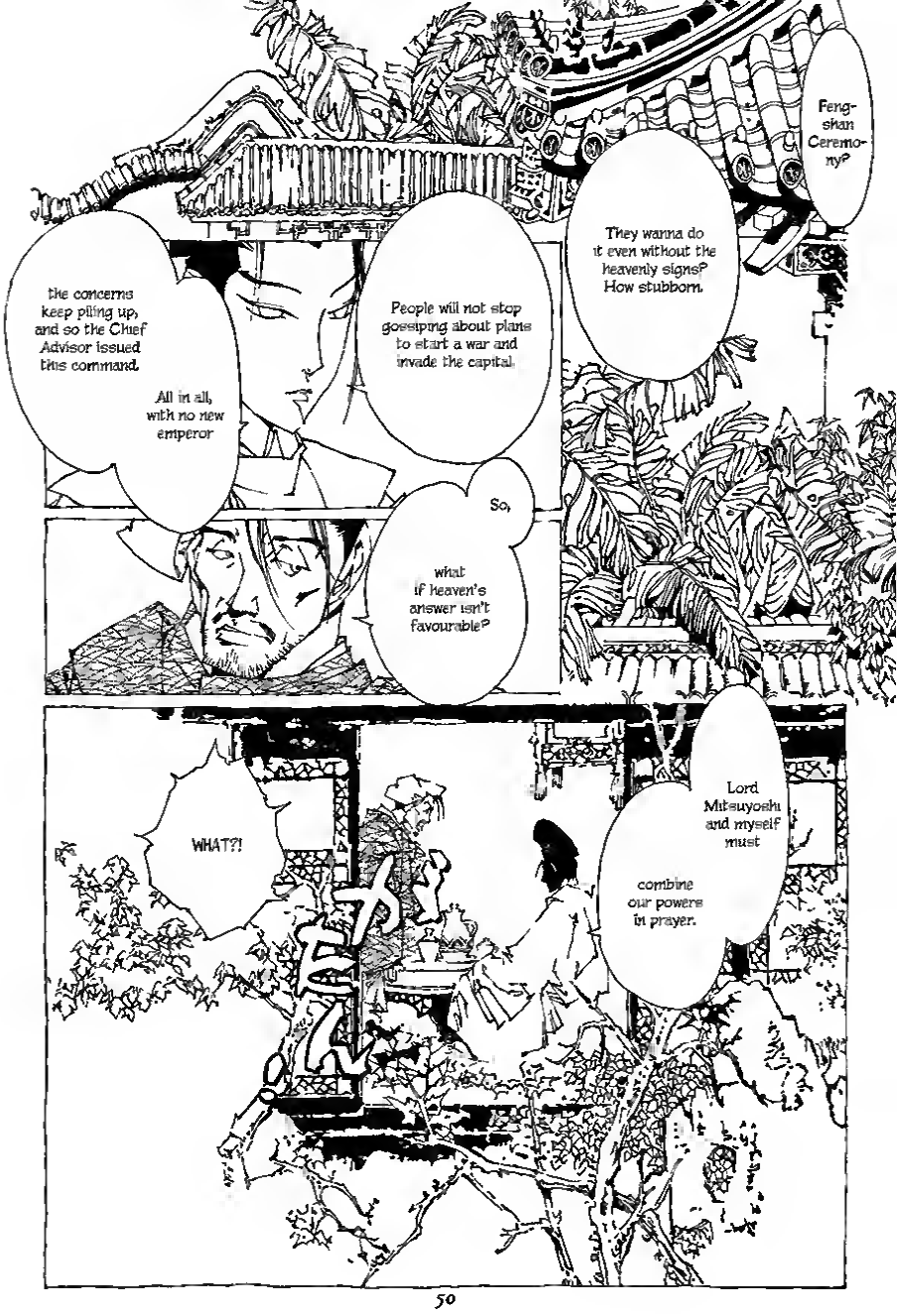

Mikuzu?
It sounds like you're talking to someone Is there a visitor?
Yes.
My mother...
DON'T!
If anybody else discovers me, including your father, I won't be able to return to this world.
I will come again tomorrow night.
By the way, Mikuzu,
did you call on the onmyoji Abe no Seimei, to ask if he would visit and investigate your father's illness?
That won't do
He is a horrible man who controls demons.
You cannot rely on someone like him, and besides, the person I spoke of will surely cure your father.
Alright?
Keep it to yourself.
I hope you understand.


Hey, Mikuzu!
Mikuzu!
Onomaru?
You came early
Today...
Wanna drop by that yin yang doctor's house one more time?
What about you?
I'm off to town to buy an unlined kimono for my neighbour's wife.

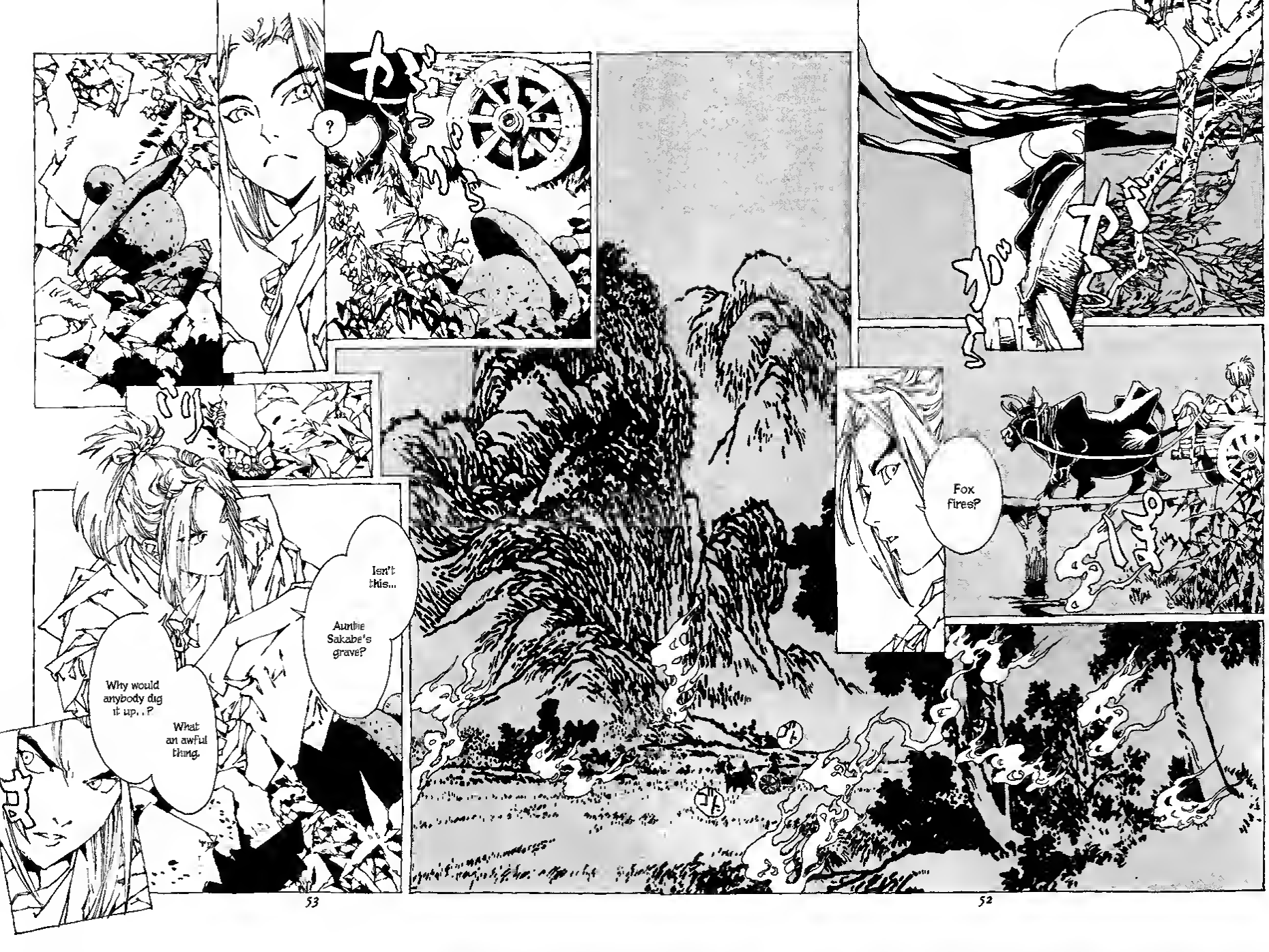

Today, Father looks like he might be able to get out of bed, so I thought
I'd go pick some vegetables. But if it's not a problem, you could give me a ride.
Sure.
The water is beautifully clear.
It flows close to the source of the falls at Mt Otowa.
If not for floods, it would never become tainted.
No, these days the waters are dyed red.
In the capital they know nothing of the constant war between east and west, or that the Bando warriors are rousing troops.
It's just traveling gossip.
with bloodstained swords and are refused entry, so they wash their gear in the nearby river.
Each time the court officials dispatch troops of their own, they return to the capital

As the villagers say, over time even these white flowers will turn brown.
The conflicts of the human world still haven't ended.
And you, Oniomaru...
Do you think you'll go to war one day?
What then?
Maybe I should become king of somewhere or other...
but in terms of seeking my fortune, I hate war.
I still like a good fight,
I'd build a country where you and Uncle Sakabe could lead a carefree life
I'm so happy, Oniomaru.

Really?
Does that really make you happy?
Yeah.
Who else but you would always be racking their brains for our sake?
Alright!
I'm definitely gonna be king of someplace.
Of course! That old kugutsu theatre guy we met yesterday,
on the bridge. He looked educated, I'll ask him to teach me.
Come to think of it, I can't read.
Okay
Why not make your delicious nameshi today?
Mikuzu, pick those greens.
Uncle's gotta have a long life too.


Feng-shan Ceremony?
They wanna do it even without the heavenly signs? How stubborn.
People will not stop gossiping about plans to start a war and invade the capital.
the concerns keep piling up, and so the Chief Advisor issued this command.
All in all, with no new emperor
So, what if heaven's answer isn't favourable?
WHAT?!
Lord Mitsuyoshi and myself must combine our powers in prayer.

I had hoped that our prayers would garner some divine response from heaven, but in the end we were given no guidance.
The true master of our field was your father Lord Yasunori, who tutored me
I am at a loss.
We could never succeed with astronomy or tortoiseshell divination.
No.
They wouldn't listen?
When do they wanna do it?
Uh-huh.
Next month. Before the rite of Minazuki.


?
Fox Fires?
Isn't this...
Auntie Sakabe's grave?
Why would anybody dig it up...?
What an awful thing.

Mikuzu...

TRANSLATION NOTES

Toribeno – A large cremation ground near Kyoto, mentioned in The Tale of Genji.

Multicoloured Curtain, etc. – Many aspects of Noh theatre are referenced in this manga, as if it were a play. The entrance curtains ("agemaku") have five multicoloured vertical stripes – green, yellow, orange, white, and purple – corresponding to the Chinese elements. Behind the curtain sit the musicians, who tune their instruments before the performance starts ("oshiraba"). The particular flute music that introduces supporting characters ("nanoribua") is also mentioned.

Modoribashi – A bridge in Kyoto where the 10th century samurai Watanabe no Tsuna is supposed to have encountered a demon disguised as a beautiful woman.

Kobold – Along with the benshee, goblins, ogres and so on, the lesser-known kobolds come from European mythology. Traditionally they are shapeshifting sprites who help people around the house, or else play tricks on them. Some live underground and are more malicious, like the dog-faced kobolds depicted here.

Keeper of the Imperial Archives – A rough translation of Yukitsuna's court title. This is probably a courtesy name which has nothing to do with his actual duties.

TRANSLATION NOTES

Keiun Era – Even after it adopted the Gregorian calendar, Japan has continued to identify years using era names. Since the Meiji Restoration the era name has only changed upon the ascension of a new emperor, but in the past they changed every few years, usually triggered by some great event or need to dispel bad luck. The historical Keiun Era lasted from May 704 AD to January 708 AD, in the early Nara Period. However, in the Otogizoshi collection of tales, Tamamo no Mae was originally supposed to have been active in the late Heian Period, during Emperor Konoe's reign, which is when this manga appears to be set.

Tenma Hajun – In Japanese Buddhism, he is the fierce king of demons who resides in the Sixth Heaven, the realm of desire, and lures people into doing evil.

Nagaoka-kyo – Before being permanently established at Heian-kyo (Kyoto) in 794 AD, the capital was frequently moved around. Emperor Kanmu made Nagaoka-kyo his capital in 784 AD, but abandoned it after a series of misfortunes.

Fengshen Ceremony – An imperial Chinese custom adopted by the Japanese court in which the emperor made sacrifices to heaven ("feng") and earth ("shen").

TRANSLATION NOTES

Onmyoji – The "yin yang doctor" Mikuzu speaks of is an onmyoji, a civil servant who practices onmyodo. Formalised in the 7th century, onmyodo was a style of esoteric cosmology based on Chinese Wu Xing, but over time it absorbed elements of Taoism, Buddhism, and Shinto. In ancient Japan, especially the Heian Period, members of the Onmyo Bureau held great influence at the imperial court, and were respected natural scientists as well as fortune tellers and exorcists.

Tengu's Child – Bird-like, long-nosed demons named tengu are said to live in the mountains and forests of Japan. Buddhists called them the ghosts of arrogant priests who abducted children, drove them mad, and returned them home again.

Kugutsu – Groups of travelling performers who specialised in dancing and singing imayo ("modern style") songs in pre-feudal times. Apparently kugutsu women also prostituted themselves on the side. Their name can also mean "puppet".

Zeni – Obsolete currency consisting of round copper coins with square holes in the centre. One gold coin was equivalent to 4,000 zeni. Japan first minted its own coins in the 8th and 9th centuries, but then resumed using Chinese money.

TRANSLATION NOTES

Aba no Saimei – The most famous of all onmyoji, who lived from 921 to 1005 AD at the height of the Heian Period. His exploits became legendary and he is often rumoured to have inherited supernatural powers from his mother Kuzunoha, who was a fox spirit masquarading as a woman. His descendant Aba no Yasuchika was the one who appeared in the Otogizoshi tale of Tamamo no Mae.

Kamo no Mitsuyoshi – A more obscure onmyoji who was nonetheless a leading figure of the Heian court, and skilled at creating calendars. Seimei's contemporery.

Shiki – Also shikigami, a magical being onmyoji could summon to assist them.

Eguchi – A port near Osaka, the setting of a Noh play about a virtuous harlot.

Seiryoden – A pavilion on the east side of the imperial palace.

Ronin – Samurai were expected to serve one family for life, so if their master died or dismissed them, they became ronin forced to wander in search of work.

Mount Otowa – This mountain sits behind the temple of Kiyomizudera in Kyoto.

TRANSLATION NOTES

Bando Warriors – One of many names for the people of Kanto, who at the time were considered little more than barbarians. They were known for their bravery.

Nameshi – A simple dish consisting of rice boiled with vegetables.

Tortoiseshell Divination – A type of divination imported from China, wherein heat was applied to holes drilled in a tortoiseshell and the cracks then interpreted.

Kamo no Yasunori – Mitsuyoshi's father was considered the greatest onmyoji of his time. He taught Seimei everything he knew and named him his successor.

Rite of Minazuki – Purification rites held on the last day of the sixth month of the old Japanese lunar calendar, in midsummer. Minazuki means "water month" since this was the time of year when rice fields were flooded before planting.

Fox Fires – In Japanese folklore, ghostly lights that appear at night are attributed to fox spirits. They can be red, orange, or even blue. Sometimes fox fire is a good omen, but usually it's blamed for making people lose their way in the dark.